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High Wickham
Hertford.

Theodore Watts Erg.

With the author's compliments.

Jan 20. 1904.

POEMS

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2:

2:

TO
FRANK T. BULLEN,
OUR MODERN ULYSSES,
I DEDICATE THESE VERSES
IN ADMIRATION AND AFFECTION.

CONTENTS.

	PAGE
TO A CHILD	1
THE VIGIL	2
MARSYAS	8
A BLACKBIRD	13
YAMATO'S BRIDE	14
LOVE IS EVER AT THE SPRING	20
TO A SPIDER	21
SPRING	23
THE WONDERFUL ISLE	27
THE BATTLE OF QUIBERON BAY	28
THE SUMMONS	34
WHO ART THOU, CHRIST?	35
CORONATION SONG	37
THE COMING OF SPRING	39
THE CHRISTMAS GATHERING	40
AFTER SPRING	41
AFTER SUMMER	44
AFTER AUTUMN	47
AFTER WINTER	50

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Nov 4, 1933



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Jan 20. 1904

Theodore Watts. Esq.
The Pines. Putney.

Dear Sir,
Will you accept from a distant
admirer a little volume of verse.
Yours truly,
Will Fothergill.

I cannot picture even in thought
What madness moved my spirit then—
So calmly have the long years wrought,
So long have I been far from men.

Life had no lure save by thy side ;
The frantic battle-field I sought,
And careless if I lived or died
Like one invulnerable fought.

But in the moonlight when I stood
And gazed upon the ghastly dead,
The madness died from out my blood
And from the murderous field I fled.

Upon the hollow-murmuring seas
I sought to drown the battle's din,
Hoping to find the wanderer's peace
And pardon for my double sin.

And the low sobbing of the wave
Answered the sobbing of my breast,
And oft the soft green ocean grave
Cried unto me to be at rest.

To be at rest—ah mocking cry !
When the ship struck, of all the lost
Death refused one ! I, only I,
Living, upon the shore was tossed !

Spurned of the sea, for death unmeet,
I stood upon the Holy Land;
What bourne was mine? With aimless feet
I trod the burning desert sand.

Beneath the deathly hills I stood
Where grows no grass, no flower fair,
And saw the Jordan roll his flood
On the doomed cities buried there.

Within the Holy Sepulchre
Amazed I watched at Easter-day
The frenzied pilgrims, when the fire
Burst from the tomb where Jesus lay.

Ever I wandered finding gloom—
The havoc of the infidel—
The desolate site, the mouldered tomb—
O'er all the land a dreary spell.

No hopeful voices gladdened me,
No unveiled women's faces smiled:
The Moslem in his poverty
Passed by the Greek as one defiled.

And never found I liberty
Till on the hill-side I drew breath
Beside the sea of Galilee,
The white-walled homes of Nazareth.

As on the Monastery bare
I gazed—I thought of you shut in
By convent walls. I breathed a prayer,
And passed to shrive me of my sin.

On chant and paternoster bent
The monks in wonder gazed on me
Who could not find their strait content
Nor win their faith's simplicity.

Fain had they taught me to despise
The world and all its fretful cares,
Their simple soothing ministries
To love, their life of fast and prayers.

Fain had I learned and sternly strove,
But only years of chastening days
Could quench the Self that even in Love
Finds still a secret lurking place.

Not as of old my love for thee ;
The warm and throbbing Past is dead :
Such passion as in Heaven may be,
Such gladness on my heart is shed.

In visions of the day and night
I follow thy sweet ministry—
The face so calm, the hands so white,
The eyes so soft with charity.

For this I slack not heart or hand—
For this I crucify my pride—
That I, even I, may one day stand
Not all unworthy by thy side.

Ah love, the midnight hush is gone,
The stars fade from the sky and sea,
On wings of pearl the Dawn floats down,
The awakening village beckons me.

Once more to lift the sufferer's head,
Once more with Christ to assuage man's woe,
Unto the dying and the dead
In farewell ministry I go.

And when at length full wearily,
Struck by the hidden foe, I turn,
And in the lonely chapel lie—
When gasping tongue and forehead burn

And human help is not, then thou
Wilt steal from out thy convent walls,
And touch the fevered hand and brow
And answer to the voice that calls.

And in thy pure face I shall see,
As in a glass, my sins forgiven,
My passing soul shall peacefully
Rise with thy gentle prayers to heaven.

MARSYAS.

Motionless on the hills the Shepherd lay
Gazing into the West. The immortal God,
Stepping from cloud to cloud with rosy feet,
Had left a crimson stairway down the sky;
And a gold ladder up the purple sea
Leaping and quivering to that glory ran.
There was no faintest sound in earth or air :
Only the slow Moon, fearful in the East,
Climbed, clad in delicate mist, and one by one,
On that soft splendour fading in the West,
From their far-glimmering homes the stars looked
down.

Erelong the Night grew full of whisperings ;
Zephyr arose and there was strife in heaven ;
Like mighty charioteers sped the fierce clouds—
Each strenuous horseman lashing on his steeds,
Urged by that glittering balcony of eyes,
Around the vast arena of the sky.

A dread delight, a palpitating joy,
At that high conflict moved the shepherd's heart :
For should not he, a mortal, on the morrow
Contend with an Immortal ? Should not he
The cold disdainful eyes of gods compel,
And with an earthly strain arrest the heavens ?

The gift of the high Goddess at his side
Insensibly he lifted to his lips,
But breathed no note : silent etherial strains,
More rich, more passionate, than the nightingale's,
Flooded his soul. Into the wide deep night
He gazed, then drooped his head as if for sleep.

But sleep came not to those bright-shining eyes ;
A shepherd on the hills again he lay—
His flock about him—with no higher aim
Than sleep and food. Upon a Summer's eve
A curious treasure on the heights he found,
The Flute but now touched by immortal lips ;
With the first breath a soul was born in him ;
The beauty of green grass, the joys of streams,
The silent rapture of the stealing dew,
The wondering thoughts of newly-opened flowers,
Dimly he felt. The hearing, that doth hear
Where no sound is ; the inner sight, that sees
Behind appearance to the soul of things,
Were born—and still more penetrating grew
As o'er his Art new mastery he gained.

Ah joy, to pipe beneath the stars all night,
To usher in the Dawn with song, to lure
Beasts from their prey, birds from their singing mates,
And stir to pleasure even creeping things !
And then to be diffused a joy through all,
One with all life and penetrating all !
To know the way of fishes in the sea,
The flight of birds that sleep upon the wing,
The deadly joy of battle-urging beasts,
The luxury of nakedness that bathes
The savage roaming ancient solitudes !
To be the sunbeams chasing o'er green fields,
The mazy moonlight gliding thro' dark seas,
The fiery throbbing pulses of the Dawn,
The gentle meditations of the Noon,
The slow voluptuous dying of the Eve,
The never silent voices of the Night !
The bitter thoughts of sleepless Winter winds
To know, the human ache of Autumn's heart,
The solitary sorrows of the clouds,
The disillusioned yearnings of the living,
The strenuous expectation of the dead !
The pang of the enduring hours to know,
The passion of lone summits for the Sun,
The burning of hot deserts for the dew !
After the Winter's nakedness and gloom
To be attired in blossoms and green leaves !
To glean with Autumn gold that brings no curse,
And fruits whose sweetness are the Summer's dreams !

To leap from nothingness to splendid life,
Awaked from death by passionate songs of birds !
To feel the changes of the mellowing Year,
And droop with all things lovely to the grave !

And then to contemplate the mortal tale—
Its bright beginning and sad close ; to see
The little dreamer rosy out of sleep—
The child just venturing to walk—the youths
And maids at happy toil, or linked in love
Beneath the moon blissfully wandering—
The man on mighty speculation bent,
Or rearing temples to the careless gods,
Or for the battle terribly arrayed—
The mother singing at her household tasks,
Without ambition and with happiness
Content ; and last the slowly silvering years,
The hoary head with ripe experience crowned,
The eyes that grow to wistful memories,
The hanging hands, the lips of speech bereft,—
The tide at ebb that nevermore can rise :
Anon, a little handful of white dust,
The chilly urn—the human tale complete.

Such thoughts were with the Shepherd in the night,
Such mighty sorrows, such o'er-burdening joys.
Almost he knew in that exalted hour
The bliss of the Immortals ; from the dust
Felt he divorced, lifted above decay,

A comrade of the stars. Despising sleep,
He chafed for the bright Dawn, for the dread hour
Of trial. But when now Aurora strewed
The Eastern halls with roses, when the sea
Put on his dazzling robe, and on the hills
Gathered immortal presences where stood
The radiant Sun-God smiling with cold eyes,—
Like one who hath been dreaming overmuch,
Heavy, with thoughts confused, Marsyas arose—
A mortal conscious of mortality,
Doomed to high failure, baffled ere the event.

A BLACKBIRD.

A blackbird in an apple-tree,
As I was passing sang to me ;
' O brooding heart, let be ! let be !
 Why sorrow where you cannot mend ?
 Shall not all sorrow have an end ?
 O fool, on prison thoughts to spend
The hour that might have liberty !

' Blithe are the trees and meadows round,
White daisies tuft the churchyard mound,
Whate'er betide, sweet is the sound
 Of birds that to each other call,
 Of wind and rain and waterfall,
And bright the sun is over all
That goes with his own gladness crowned !'

YAMATO'S BRIDE.

NOTE.—The subject of this poem was suggested by an old Japanese legend in Mrs. Fraser's "Diplomatist's Wife in Japan."

Yamato to the battle went
With pomp and retinue and pride,
His spirit was on glory bent,
"Fame, Fame, be mine," he cried.

"Farewell, Princess," he coldly said,
"When thou dost sip thy wine at ease,
Of battles think and bright blood shed,
And pray thy gods for peace."

She answered him with quiet pride,
"My Lord, one duty hath a wife—
To stand at her own husband's side
And serve in death and life.

"I go with thee through fire and flood!
Welcome all hardships that are thine!
While thy sword drinketh bitter blood
Shall I drink honeyed wine?"

Yamato gazed upon his bride
Half in wonder and half in scorn,
Pity scarce touched his youthful pride
And love was not yet born.

"If thou wilt share a soldier's bed
And follow o'er the crimson field,
Equip thee like a page" he said
"And bear my sword and shield."

She answered him with silent love,
She put her flowing robes away;
Slim as a bird she seemed to move
Tricked in her new array.

With banner, plume, and trumpet blare,
Forth went the glittering cavalcade;
At first, right royally they fare,
Such joy the people made.

But now beneath the blistering sun
In drear and dusty ways they tread,
And now beneath the chilly moon
The damp earth is their bed.

His page behind Yamato rode,
Bravely she bare his shield and sword,
Nor lightened he that heavy load
By any smile or word.

Often with drouth her lips were parched,
Ever the common meal she shared,
But like a soldier still she marched
And like a soldier fared.

Beside a Castle old and fair
They halt to pass the noontide hours;
There dwelt a peerless lady there,
A flower amid her flowers.

Beneath dark hair and beautiful
Soft as the moonlight shone her face,
Her silken robes were rich and cool,
And full of ease her ways.

Upon his bride so strangely clad,
So worn and stained, the young Prince gazed;
A bloomless face, a face most sad,
Unto his own she raised.

He looked upon that other face
And of his bride ashamed was he,
Such languid and voluptuous grace
Won his heart utterly.

He lingered in her radiant bowers
 Holden a willing prisoner there,
He praised her birds, her wine, her flowers,
 But most the lady fair.

Nor once he owned his royal bride
 Nor revered her high lineage :
A menial she stood aside—
 A poor discarded page.

And when they gat to horse again,
 So haughtily he rode before,
Her spirit failed, and she was fain
 To turn and ride no more.

For he with wine was insolent,
 With the strong wine of lawless love :
Much scorn upon his page he spent,
 So lamely did she move.

They came unto a strip of sea,
 Halting perforce : whereat in pride—
“Why wait we here for boats ?—a sea !
 “Tis but a brook !” he cried.

“So slight a thing to block my path !
 Ye Heavens, 'tis scarce a running leap !”
He spake—the Sea-Gods heard in wrath,
 The Gods that never sleep.

They heard, and soon the murderous waves
Around his frail craft rose and fell,
Like ravening mouths they seemed, like graves
That shuddered down to Hell.

The young and boastful Prince grew pale,
He pleaded with the Gods to spare,
But deadlier rose the waves, the gale
Drove deadlier through the air.

He shivered in his naked pride,
He cowered before those angry seas:
"Ah, is there none to save?" he cried,
"Will none the Gods appease?"

Life fought with love most bitterly
Within that gentle page's breast:
On him she looked, and on the sea,
And sore was she distressed.

"O Prince," she said, "thou knowest how
Thy heart hath ever turned from me!
I gave my love in vain, and now
I give my life to thee!"

Pale and beautiful she stood,
Her anguished brow white as the snow:
One moment gazed she on the flood,
The next she plunged below.

Calm grew the sea : the wind was still :
The prince bewildered gained the shore ;
Upon his foes he wrought his will,
Then sought the sea once more.

There on his youth fell sudden age :
“ How fair a form hath Love, when fled !
Come back, and I will be *thy* page,
Come back, belovéd dead ! ”

LOVE IS EVER AT THE SPRING.

Love is ever at the Spring,
Lovers cannot weary ;
With brave songbirds in the heart
How can days go dreary !

Dawn from dawn steals rosy joy,
Eve from eve doth borrow ;
I shall meet my love to-day
And again to-morrow.

O this glad and foolish heart
Fed on dreams and fancies !
Like a child it goes all day,
Laughs and sings and dances.

TO A SPIDER.

O spider, why art in disgrace
With ladies fine ?
They shudder at thy bald round face
And watchful eyne.

Thy shape, I grant thee, is amiss ;
And verily
It seems where so much body is
Small soul may be.

But thou art of the artist race,
Yea can'st delight
All eyes, and weave to wondrous grace
Stuffs poor and slight.

It may be for ignoble ends
Thou dost create,
But *style* for all things makes amends,
'Tis said of late !

And thou dost set thy snare with skill :
Hid patiently—
Thou lur'st thy victim 'gainst his will,
And hold'st thy prey :

While man at every joy must snatch,
And of his pelf
Build snares, poor fool, only to catch
At last himself.

Well, for myself, I could forgive
Thy every sin,
And bid thee—yea for ever—live,
Would'st thou but spin !

For lo, when Autumn fruit falls fast,
And the heart grieves
Because to death all fair things haste—
Flowers and green leaves :

When every hedge and tree is bare,
In morning mists
Thou dost outspread thy treasures rare—
Pearls, amethysts.

SPRING.

Trill, blithe birds, in hedge and tree,
Hasten songsters o'er the sea !
Laverocks, high in Heaven, sing
Spring, the Spring, the perfect Spring !
Needs an angel's voice to tell
God's divinest miracle !

Drear November fogs have flown :
Flowerless December's gone :
Ploughboys gay, fantastical,
Pay their January call :
February droops her head
With the snowdrop on its bed :
And bitter March worn out at last,
Lieth slain by his own blast.

Blindly thro' the tattered woods
And the moaning solitudes
Winter, like a beggar, goes,
Fearful, haggard, full of woes,
Wandering like a tramp, here, there,
Without purpose everywhere.

But his end comes peacefully
In an orchard taking rest,
Peering up at the blue sky,
Fading into dreams among
Happy flowers and butterflies,
Where, to soothe his mood distress,
Hidden thrush pipes music low,
And the blackbird sings a song
Fitting such an aged woe,
While one by one the trees let fall
Whitest snowflakes for his pall.

Yea, the Winter sleeps at last :
Earth is flushed with green, and snow
Only in the sky doth go,
Only on the trees is massed.
How plump, how plump the sparrows are
After March's scanty fare !
How loud the jolly birds do sing
Nest-making and love-making !
In a pause of music, hush,
Curlew, corncrake, blackbird, thrush,
The starling mimics at his will
In mockery irresistible !

'Tis a happy time I ween,
Babes are tumbling on the green,
Old men doff their look of care,
Daisies scent the delicate air,

Eager lads bird-nesting go :
Hungering for looks of praise
Village maids in frocks of snow,
Minding April's saucy ways,
Loiter that they may be seen :
'Tis a happy time I ween ;
Earth hath quite forgot her care,
Nature smileth everywhere.

World-bound hearts that know no rest,
Apathetic souls unblest,
Your needless cares, your useless doubts,
The merry mocking April flouts ;
She will whisper in your ear
Secrets that ye long to hear—
From far distant paradise :
Come and lie beneath the skies,
Thoughtless children be again.

Buxom lads and lasses, too,
With your cheeks like apple-blossoms
And with young love in your bosoms,
Come into the fields to woo.
Come with me and we will sit
Where the chestnut boughs are lit
With a thousand tapers bright,
Or beneath the vinery
Of the spreading sycamore,
Salmon-pink whose young leaves be :

There upon the grassy floor
I will tell for your delight—
Haply for your wisdom too—
Of lovers who once loved as you,
Passionately loved and true,
Whose love did end in tragedy—
Lest your own love too joyful be.

THE WONDERFUL ISLE.

Foam-kissed by sapphire seas that know no plummet,
Its loudest breeze a long-drawn Summer sigh,
Sea-cliffs at base, Sea-Temples at the summit,
The Isle on blue wings flutters to the sky.

Its lightest shadows are but sunshine dreaming,
Its deeper shades but moonlight fast asleep;
Its soft-hued halls with pearléd treasure gleaming
Show like the wizard grottoes of the deep.

Here, out of dreams Spring seems for ever waking,
The wealth of all the seas and shores is there,
Here birds are singing and there waves are breaking,
And Love is goddess of that garden fair.

THE BATTLE OF QUIBERON BAY.

When England from dishonour woke and Pitt her
fortunes kept,
And up the Heights of Abraham young Wolfe at
midnight leapt,
For six long months or more
On the wild Biscayan shore,
Through the shrieking, tearing, black October gale,
Through the mist and through the cold, like to sheep
penned in a fold,
Hawke held the Frenchmen prisoner with five and
twenty sail.

His vessels were the vilest that ever dared the wave—
Their bottoms foul with grass and slime, and reeking
like the grave :
The main-masts they were rotten,
And the rigging tore like cotton,
And scurvy it had riddled every crew ;
Not a cabin in the fleet but was like a dripping sheet
When the Biscay banged its broadsides and the great
gales blew.

But the men had nerves of iron and wills like piercing
flame,
They swore by England's honour and the grand old
English name,
And they cursed the Frenchmen's caution—
For was not war their portion ?—
And all the odds were with a daring foe !
They had heard the swelling boast of that army on
the Coast,
And they itched to show their mettle and to let the
French King know.

But with November came a storm—three days the
tempest blew,
And to Torbay with shattered ships our sullen
Admiral drew :
Again he dared the main—
To be driven back again,
And when he reached Ushant against the gale,
On the horizon's rim he saw with anger grim
Among the Heaven's flying clouds a cloud of flying
sail.

The English followed after—it was a glorious race,
There was blowing a Nor-Wester stirring music to
the chase,
And the good ships crowding sail
Ran on before the gale

And tossed the leaping seas from prow and stern,
And the heart of our great fighter grew every moment
lighter—

For at last the wily Admiral was caught and he must
turn.

But the cunning of the Frenchman devised a defter
plan,

Upon that shore of rocks and shoals with all his ships
he ran,

His pilots knew the way

To thrid dread Quiberon's Bay

And baffle a pursuer close at hand :

Now the granite Breton rock doth the English
Admiral mock

And the quicksand and the shallow and the foeman
on the land.

But like a breathless bloodhound who is almost on
his prey

The English sea-dog only glared and would not turn
away ;

' If the Bay can hold the foe

There is room for me to go ! '

And straightway down upon the foe he went :

To the thundering on high rose the gunners'
answering cry

And the lightning of the linstock with the Heaven's
lightning blent.

Quoth Hawke unto the pilot who deemed his Captain
mad—

‘You have warned me as you ought to, you have done
your duty lad !

Where the Admiral’s colours fly

Now lay my good ship by ;

An Admiral an Admiral’s foe should be ! ’

La Superbe rode in his way and proudly bade him
stay—

But her answer was a broadside and a swift grave in
the sea.

Awhile with seven of the foe the English Admiral
fought,

Till even that grim fighter had his fill of battle sport :

Equal giants in the fray

The *Thesée* and *Torbay*

Grappled and tossed upon that slippery floor,

Till, a black and towering heap, rose a great wave
from the deep,

And broke sheer into her portholes and the *Thesée*
was no more.

O never since our Island rose was fought so wild a
fight

Mid the thunder of the breakers and the falling of
the night :

Like a scourge the tempest swept,

On the guns the fierce seas leapt,
But ever through the bleak November gloom,
Like drunkards mad with wine, like heroes half-
divine,
The great ships fought and staggered and closed and
met their doom.

But the day was with the English, they might not be
withstood,
For the rock was in their courage and the gale was
in their blood :
More dread than shoal or sea
Was this dread enemy
Whose Captain was the very god of war !
Seven huge ships of the Line heaved their guns into
the brine
And ran for perilous shelter o'er the river's sandy bar.

Then darkness fell upon the fight, but the storm rode
on amain,
And all that night above the wind cried ship to ship
in vain,
And lo, at break of Dawn,
A battered hull forlorn,
The Admiral's ship lay anchored mid our Fleet ;
But he hauled his cable swift upon the shoals to drift,
For the great and gallant Englishman again he would
not meet.

And what of the Flotilla, that should invade our land,
The gay` adventurous legions—that brave all-
conquering band!

Watchers on an idle shore

They may wait for evermore

The ships that should have borne them to their
prize—

For the Fleet that was their pride lies the sport of
every tide,

And its shattered dreams of glory are but hapless
memories.

THE SUMMONS.

Rouse thee, hasten from thy bed !
Weep not at thy plight !
To the far land of the dead
Must thou go to-night.

Of thy stricken child and wife
Snatch a swift adieu,
Of the earth which gave thee life
Steal a last brief view.

Naked under starless skies
To an unknown home
Hence thou goest. Speed thee, rise,
For thine hour is come !

WHO ART THOU, CHRIST?

O Jew, whom Thine own generation would not—
That all the generations might possess,
Thou who dost greatly shape our latter days
And of the sleeping Future art the promise,
Thou scorned and buffeted the more to bless,
Thou put to man's last shame from shame to free,
Thou who did'st die triumphantly to live,—
On whom the great world leans of Christendom,
On whom the mighty thinkers fix their thoughts
Perplexed, who dost allure even worldly men ;
Dreamer whose gaze is on Eternity,
Victor of Fate and its accomplisher,
Who art not and who art for evermore,
Above all heroes, prophets, poets, saints,
In Thy great personality remote,
August, serenely smiling at our doubts,
Elusive yet beside our thought alway,
Thou, who art still the loneliest of men,
Thou paradox and potent mystery,
So hated and so loved,—Who art Thou, Christ ?

For no mere shade of History Thou art,
Who in Thine hour of utmost weakness still
Didst claim the grand prerogatives of God,
Going to death not as we captives go
But willingly and with triumphant step—
A living Christ Thou art eternally
Imperatively haunting who ignore,
A closest friend, a presence never far,
A lover terrible e'en to Thy loved,
A sympathiser knowing human flesh,
A critic going to the very soul,
An awful judge whose right to doom is clear,
A man of Heaven come down to help our clay,
A man of Earth to lift us to the Heaven.

O for the eyes to see Thee as Thou art !
O for a heart all passionate for Thee !

CORONATION SONG.

Ye who dwell in lands afar, ye who dwell at home,
Children of the Winter roof, of the Summer dome,
Speakers of one mother-tongue sundered by the foam,
Sons of England's Empire, of the Greater Rome—
Hail this day your King and Queen, Lord and Lady
fair,
Hail the land that gave you birth and your native air,
Clasp your brethren by the hand who your glories
share,
Drain the cup of deep goodwill, greet without a care!

One are we in heart and speech, one in loyalty,
Sons of Harold, sons of Alfred, Harry's sons are we,
Of the brood of Shakespeare, lord o'er land and sea,
Of the stock of Milton, mighty children free:
Hail to our great fathers who this nation made,
Hail to our great rulers whom our sires obeyed,
To the Truth that stablished, to the Faith that stayed,
To the Trust that built on God and was not dismayed.

What they won, shall we not keep?—to their glory
add?

Armèd with their temper, in their spirit clad,
In the quest of honour still divinely mad,
Brave as proven heroes and as children glad?
Nourished unto battle, ready for the foe,
Heedless of the bitter, temperate of the blow,
Followers of wisdom neither swift nor slow,
Dauntless to the day of doom ever will we go.

Up the hard hills toiling to the higher ways,
Pure in heart and pure in life, living strenuous days,
Swift and frank our faults to own, swift the foe to
praise,
Through defeat grown sterner, stronger through
delays,
Sons of them whose tears and blood got us victory,
Proud of this great heritage builded by the free—
What though all the envious world arm our foe to
be?
We will march from land to land linking sea to sea.

THE COMING OF SPRING.

The choristers are met,
 Rested, and fain for song,
Each in his hidden station set
 The happy route along.

Through all the woods, behold !
 Deep in the dewy shade,
Long velvet carpets of pale gold
 The primroses have laid.

How fresh the grass, how green !
 What welcome breathes the air !
Did ever court for maiden Queen
 So royally prepare ?

THE CHRISTMAS GATHERING.

Now all the jovial guests are here
Flash forth the merry quip!
All things forget but song and cheer;
Here's to good fellowship!

Ah God! the mirth is not sincere,
The laughter is in vain,
A silence falls—*it will appear,*
That buried face again.

AFTER SPRING.

No more the sullen clouds
Muffle the pine-tops as they trail along,
Nor in their ghost-white shrouds
The lifeless meadows sleep, forlorn of song :
With every morning's dew
Heaven gains a higher dome and earth a clearer view.

In dainty pink and white
The bowery orchards toss their foam-flakes high,
Swinging their seas of light
Against the mellow radiance of the sky ;
Loosened by hands unseen
The wind-cuffed petals fall to wilt on 'carpets green.

Touched by the year's delight,
The rich rank buttercups like wild fire run ;
Daisies in kirtles white
Dance on the lawn and blush beneath the sun ;
The bracken's silvery ball
Creeps up its naked stem and spreads a shade o'er all.

In quiet haunts remote
The nesting birds upon their treasures brood ;
Unto a household note
The passion of their love song is subdued :—
Frail homes of joy and care
Soon built and soon forsaken for the boundless air.

Far from the smoky town
The elves and sprites hide in the truant shades,
And sail their skiffs adown
The winding music of the golden glades :
Their boats are blades of grass,
And weaving coats for summer flowers they sing and
pass.

All lovely sights appear
The mystic porch and fading vestibule
Of visions lovelier :
The streams run deep with thought : each wayside
pool,
A glimpse of fleeting sky,
Dazzles in broken sunlight as the breezes fly.

Summer has wed the Year ;
He woo'd in April, and he won in May ;
In every thicket near,
Unseen they celebrate their bridal gay ;
June is their first-born child :
Bluebells are in her eyes—her cheeks are roses wild.

Soon shall her maiden form
For woman's grace its lighter charms surrender,
Her breath blow soft and warm,
Her frolic eyes with love's sweet cares grow tender ;
Her smile shall hush the sky,
And in her lap asleep the birds and flowers lie.

AFTER SUMMER.

Where late the wild bee brushed
The fragrant dog-rose clusters, leaves hang lone ;
With many a poppy flushed
The cool white-flowering peas have bloomed and
gone ;
Summer lifts wings to fly
And breathes from honeysuckle lips her long good-bye.

Yet the frail harebell stays
Lightly upon the breeze to dream and swing ;
A thousand greener sprays
From out the old oak's bosom laughing spring ;
In contrast calm and grand
The dark-robed purpling woods and new-mown
meadows stand.

The white convolvulus drifts
In snowy foam upon the tossing hedge ;
Staunchly the bulrush lifts
His ruddy spike unsheathed among the sedge ;
From glades with bracken lined
The timid hare runs out and races with the wind.

Among the seeding grass
The moonlight-mailed thistle rises tall ;
Nettles in armies mass,
The stately hemlock towers above them all ;
Struggling for life beneath
The fragile flowers pine, and 'gin to dream of death.

The waves of wheat and rye
Higher and higher flood on every side,
Wherein the hedges lie
Like sunken reefs washed hy a golden tide :
The light lisp of the seas,
The seething of the foam, is heard in every breeze.

First of the migrant throng
His Northern haunts the eager cuckoo leaves ;
Awhile, with feast and song,
His fellows revel 'mid the fruitful sheaves ;
Erelong in secret flight
Their wings shall veil the sky with swiftly passing
night.

Each sunset Autumn stands
And scans the rippling fields of drooping rye,
Shading with archèd hands
Dark dreamy eyes against the blaze of sky :
Her smile is tinged with pride,—
Ripe fruits blush round her feet, a sickle burns beside.

Soon shall her joyous call
Charm from the village homes their rustic glory ;
The lines of wheat shall fall,
The piled-up sheaves hang down their earlocks
hoary ;
Homeward the load shall sway,
Robbed by light-fingered trees upon its labouring way.

AFTER AUTUMN.

No more the shocks of corn
Stand like twin sisters in the sunset glow,
Nor in the flush of morn
The ruddy reapers, shouting, come and go ;
Earth's golden fields are gone,
And lo, on barren plains the lurid sun looks down.

Yet still in calm serene
Earth sets her troubled heart to simpler joys,
And beauty else unseen
On every trembling leaflet seems to poise ;
The thistle shakes her gown
And from the silver folds outflows the wingéd down.

Each morn the skies are set
In pearl, weird-tinted as a wizard's hall ;
The spider's hidden net
Catches the crystal dewdrops as they fall,
Till thro' the misty air
Like to a Fairy's loom glistens each silvery snare.

With Autumn song has fled,
The circling swallow scythes no more the air ;
Upon its lowly bed
The drooping floweret pines, despite its prayer,
And falls at length to die—
Unpitied by a soul, unnoticed by an eye.

As after ceaseless rain
The chill dank glades with sodden leaves are stored ;
And by the bleak wind slain,
The smitten reed hangs down his useless sword ;
The beech, in hues of red
And bronze, mimics the withering bracken's dusky
bed.

About the dying hedge
The sere convolvulus curls amber veils ;
Still quivering on the edge,
The ranks of dewdrops file along the rails ;
With every zephyr's breath
Each slips from his frail hold, caught in the arms of
death.

O'er hill and field and wood,
Not sorrow for joys fled, or news of death,
A sovran calm doth brood—
A dove-like Peace, the sister twin of Faith ;
Knowing anew with Spring
All things shall rise again in sweeter blossoming.

So let the winter come,
Half like a thief, half like a lover stealing,
And gaze with motions dumb
On every shuddering leaflet downward reeling;
Thereon he'll make a bed
When winds and snows are drear, to lay his hoary
head.

AFTER WINTER.

Not yet the infant Spring
Hath changed her russet gown for robes of green,
But lieth slumbering,
Hid in the covert of a wood unseen ;
Folded in shadows deep,
Ethereal visions flit across her face in sleep.

Like memories of the dead
Winter revives and fades, 'mid days of blue,
And thrusts his snowy head
Upon the landscape, whitening all the view ;
With shrilly voice and thin
High singing o'er the downs the chilly breezes spin.

Here by the sharp blast switched,
The ruddy drifts about the road are swayed,
Dancing like sprites bewitched
In whirling somersaults of light and shade ;
The hollow forests ring,
Shuddering with leafless music as their lank boughs
swing.

Upon the cottage wall
The jasmine lingers in a listless dream ;
O'erhead the sparrows call,
And twitter out the day in dolorous theme ;
Whistling a sober tune
The ploughman drives his team the long dank
afternoon.

Not sorrow nor yet scorn
Nature wears on her face, but calm distress ;
Like to a child new-born
The Year's dim senses grope for consciousness ;
Through all the stilly wood
Stirreth the soul of Being, bursting blade and bud.

On herald days of Spring
The welkin with lost larks peals silverly ;
Such bridal notes they sing
The buried flowers would from their cloister flee ;
But their first maiden vows
Hold them a little longer in that sunless house.

Soon shall the violet bloom
Beneath the hedge, and scent each sheltered nook ;
The primrose gild the gloom
Where pale anemones peep o'er the brook ;
And laughing waves shall swell
Of golden daffodils in every mossy dell.

Hasten, sweet birds of song,
Wing o'er the waves and fill the woods with voices ;
Spring tarrieth, slumbering long—
She waketh not, but in her dream rejoices :
Quicken, thou magic sod,
Burst to a sea of flowers, and greet the priests of God !

CARLYLE.

Not in clear sunlight from the mountain top
Did'st thou behold
The undulating landscape of the Past,
The colour, light, and shade of all the years
Fading away into eternity ;
But as in storm,
Through rolling clouds,
In sudden lightning flash,
The exaggerated ages thou did'st see
Bold, phantom, terrible.

Thou wast a glorious Titan, with one eye
Blinded from birth,
Who in the battle strikes
Tremendously to right and left in vain
And knows not surely how the conflict goes.

SO NEAR.

Just ere I wake, just ere I sleep,
I know that lips are pressed to mine :
There where the darkness is most deep
Dimly I know a face doth shine.

Oft, unawares, I hear a voice
So quiet, so familiar,
I turn about, I have no choice :
But none hath spoke, and none is there !

A face flits by me in the street,
The eyes with such deep meaning gaze
This withered heart begins to beat
And throb as in the earlier days.

A glimpse is all that I can catch !
Even while I wonder it is gone !
Vain 'tis to listen, vain to watch,
Poor heart, left utterly alone !

And yet two things I surely know :
It is no face of flesh I see :
Even as the sunlight it doth go
Childlike, transfigured, bright and free.

And though I catch that face divine
Only at whiles, a fitful star—
Those eyes look when they will on mine,
So near is that which is afar.

THE FLIGHT OF AUTUMN.

She wanders footsore down the lane,
Her brown eyes wet with tears the while;
She hath no heart to sing again
Her sad heart to beguile.

Her dreaming footstep by the wood
Falters: she turns, and lifts her eyes
To all the waste of solitude,
The cruel lowering skies.

O she is but a gipsy now
Who was the queen of all the land!
The barley-wreath that bound her brow
Droops from her listless hand.

With bitter thought her breast doth swell,
Her lovely sun-tanned cheeks are pale,
Disordered hair and rent robe tell
A melancholy tale.

Full well she knows who follows her—
The grim and grisly-bearded one!
He hunts the hapless wanderer
Until his deed be done!

Last night asleep upon the heath,
His sleety arrows whistled by;
In harkening fear she held her breath
And rose in dreams to fly.

Ah whither shall she turn to-night?
Where still her trembling heart in peace?
They spread strong arms to stay her flight—
The secret ancient trees.

“O rest,” they say, “where you may hear
The sparrows peck the ruddy hips,
And touch the acorns lying near
With slumber-parted lips;

“Where light o’erhead the squirrels leap,
And in and out their stealthy holes
The dusky little woodmice creep
Beneath the rugged boles:

“Where, curled in leaves, the hedgehog lies
And sleeps away the hungry hours,
While infant bees and butterflies
Dream of unopened flowers.”

O she has filled her hands with leaves
Crimson and gold where they lie spread,
The rusty bracken too in sheaves
She gathers for her bed.

And soon asleep beneath she lies,
Nor feels all night upon her breast
The snowflakes fall: for her sad eyes
Have found their perfect rest.

WHY COMES SHE NOT ?

Why comes she not ?
The spent sun in the west
For all his labours cannot die.
His pillow hath no rest,
He watcheth wearily.
Why comes she not ?

Why comes she not ?
The moon before her hour
Hath risen, yearning for the face
That is earth's perfect flower,
Faultless in light and grace.
Why comes she not ?

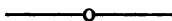
Why comes she not ?
My matchless love to spy
One star doth truant play and shine
In a forbidden sky.
O star, she is not thine !
Why comes she not ?

Why comes she not ?

Why comes she not ?
O heart, if sun, moon, star,
Desire her so, how canst thou wait ?
To them a joy afar,
To thee life, Heaven, fate !
Why comes she not ?

TO A CHILD.

With uttermost serenity
Thou askest of eternal things,
Content with answers that in me
Stir deeper questionings.



THE AFFLICTED MIND.

Even in sleep he flees in vain
The ills his waking hours do know,
Adding to pain imagined pain
And dreams of woe to woe.

APRIL.

Light on silver tiptoe tripping
Down the hills in sunny showers
She is coming, April, April,
O'er the meadows scattering flowers !
Smiling, frowning, mocking April,
Saucy darling of the year,
Sweet, capricious, tender, tearful,
Come to tell us Spring is here.

Careful shepherds, give her greeting,
Wild and wayward though she be !
At her side the lambs are bleating
And she lifts them tenderly.
All the timid creatures love her,
Fawn and squirrel know no fear,
Bounding round the feet of April,
Frolic darling of the year.

Hark ! faint cuckoo-bells are ringing !
Swallow twitterings fill the air !
All the frenzied birds are singing
Notes that only lovers dare !
Who has brought them, who has caught them,
Who has woo'd our songsters here ?
They have come at call of April,
Passionate darling of the year !

NOVEMBER.

November—and the world of shades is here !

The sun hangs like a wafer in the sky,

Shorn of his feeblest beams : no majesty

The clouds wear, but all blanched with shapeless fear

Trail on the earth : the ploughboy ploughing near

Moves insubstantial, scarce less shadowy

Than the curled mist his breath makes, while the lea

Looms half a green blot, half a vaporous smear.

And lo, what forms are these beside the streams,

That bend and shudder like to joyless ghosts ?

Can they be trees stripped bare, that only sigh

As the bleak wind sweeps through them ? Or do
hosts

Of phantoms wail, anguished by fitful gleams

From life far-off, golden with memory ?

FEBRUARY LYRIC.

Still sullen are the skies,
The black and dripping woods are dumb,
Upon the hills snow lies,
The grass is colourless and numb,
The snowdrop, bowed with grief,
Broods like an angel o'er its chastened leaf.

But though the ways are dark
And not another songbird sings,
The first notes of the lark
Bring back a lifetime of lost Springs—
Lanes flecked with hawthorn trees
And woodlands milky with anemones.

GOOD FRIDAY, 1900.**(South African War.)**

O ye, who for your land your blood have shed,
On the hard couch of anguish toss no more;
Rest ye in Him who for the whole world bled—
He too was wounded sore.

O mothers, agonizing in your loss,
To-day around one common sorrow meet;
Behold ye Mary kneeling by the Cross
And weeping at His feet.

O thoughtless world, whose deeds of selfishness
Bring on the just and innocent disgrace,
Gaze ye upon the Christ in His distress
And hide, ashamed, your face.

THE GIFT RETURNED.

Father, forgive Thy stricken ones,
If half unwillingly to Thee
They give again the precious gift
Thou gavest them so willingly.

The gift was Thine to take again,
He is Thy child, dear Lord, we know ;
But O ! our tears have blinded us
And we are broken with our woe.

Because Thou wast so lavish, Lord,
Because such bounty Thou hast shown,
Because Thy gift so precious was—
We scarce can give Thee back Thine own.

LOVE.

Lord, the love I feel for Thee
Is the love Thou taughtest me,
Love that blesses every curse,
Love that clasps the universe.

In that Love are gathered in
Wife and child and friend and kin,
Townsmen, countrymen, and all
Who upon God's name do call :

Yea and insect, bird, and flower,
Cold and heat and shine and shower,
Ether, star, and void and air,
Seen and unseen everywhere.

THERE IS A LAND.

There is a land we touch in sleep,
The seas that round it lie
Are crystal clear and azure deep
And limpid as the sky.

The folk that do inhabit there
Are buoyant as the breeze,
The maids like flowers their beauty wear,
The men their strength like trees.

In deep green grass, 'neath orchard boughs,
With virgin love for theme,
The lovers pledge eternal vows
And wake not from their dream.

And oft when balmy eve doth fall,
Old tales of earth's distress
Their twilight memories recall,
To heighten happiness.

YESTERDAY—AND NOW.

Belovèd, yesterday we walked
Together ; 'neath this very bough
We held each other's hands and talked ;
But yesterday—and now !

Why walk I all alone to-day ?
The trees, the flowers are just the same !
There is the rose you pruned, the grey
Root there you could not name.

And yonder round the holly bush
Flutter the sparrows ; but o'er all
There is a strangeness and a hush,
Strangely the song-birds call.

One dear familiar voice they miss,
That kindly hand, that dreaming brow ;
Ah ! God in Heaven, how strange it is !
But yesterday—and now !

SINGERS.

A singing child beside my bed
And singing birds without,
They tell me that the night has fled,
They sing it and they shout,
And woo in most inviting way
The peeping face of the new day.

O come to us, sweet lass, they sing,
Full merry hearts are we,
O come to us, and not a thing
Shall spoil our revelry ;
For care across our hearts shall pass
Light as the clouds above the grass.

Through the blue noon to rosy eve
Blithely shall run the hours,
And when the night comes we'll not grieve,
But fill your lap with flowers,
And call to you afar in dreams
Until another morning beams.

I CANNOT SLEEP.

I cannot sleep for thoughts of love,
My eyes will not be quiet,
Through my tired heart the dancing blood
Runs in delicious riot.

I hear the voice I know so well,
And it is calling, calling;
And through the night upon my heart
Whispers are falling, falling.

O! I shall be destroyed with bliss,
For sleep it cometh never:
Through utter joy I shall be slain,
For sleep flies love for ever.

THE BANQUET.

An ancient banqueting hall : a banquet lightly spread for two.
 The Lord Baron is standing by the table in an expectant
 attitude.

The Baron. Have I not read of a strange malady ?
 In them who are afflicted, stealthily
 The wits disordered grow : yet at the first
 So slight the change is, from a doctor's eye
 'Twere hidden, only those familiar
 With the patient's daily ways divining aught :
 Then weariness upon the body steals,
 Languor upon the mind : work cannot rouse
 Nor pleasure, appetite grows sick and dies ;
 Ever a deeper melancholy falls,
 As though the body and the soul were drugged,
 Till lethargy fades downward into death.
 For one whose aim it is to maim and thwart
 And study subtle modes of deep revenge,
 Were it not joy to see a soul brimful
 Of life, so dwindle, so die out to nought ?
 This woman with the—what's their canting phrase ?—

The rich poetic soul,—this creature bred
On fancies, who so notably doth scorn
Our pomps and splendours as most common things,
And feeds on the air—a lesson must be taught,—
Must be initiated this same hour
Into the grim reality of life,—
Learn too that despicable things have stings !
Love hath she sought—heedless how love affront
An ancient name, how base the lover be,
Stooping from her high place to smile upon
A minstrel with his gift of minstrelsy—
Love hath she sought—love shall she taste to the full !
Ah proper banquet, and ah sweet revenge—
She who hath fed on love shall feed upon
A lover !

(The curtain is drawn aside and the Lady Baroness enters. The Baron advances towards her, takes her hand and raises it to his lips).

Lady. My lord, a most unwonted courtesy.

Baron (leading her to the banqueting table)

But one the occasion warrants : graciously
From a cold husband deep i' the world immured,
And one who parted from you late in wrath,
You have accepted entertainment such
As he can give. In this most pleasant hour
I do forget what slight thing parted us.
Was it a difference political,
Domestic, or—

Lady.

My lord ! it was a song.

Baron. A song ?—ah yes, the minstrel's song—how
fond

Was I, and (pardon me) how foolish you
To let a thing so insignificant
As a mere minstrel with his harp and song,
Wandering the world to bid the foolish gape—
A creature that with menials doth feed—
Disturb our ancient peace and pride.

Lady.

My lord,

Speak not so lightly of the artist race :
Neglected oft,—poor, wanderers through the world,
Yet breathe they an inalienable power :
They are the high descendants of the gods,
They are the true possessors of the earth,
And theirs the magic secret how to live.

Baron. To live—ah now you mock them—not to
live !

Starve they not often for a paltry crust ?
Hath not the meanest tyrant power o'er them ?
Ah, 'tis a pretty jest—these sons of gods,
Possessors of the earth, who all their days
A-begging go—

Lady.

Oh no, they do not beg !

They offer priceless gifts that men despise,
But a great pride restrains them as they go,
And a great pity moves them.

Baron.

Pity ?

Lady.

Yes,

When children offered precious things choose toys,
And in their ignorant loud self-content
Grotesquely do delight, is there no call
For pity ? So is the multitude deceived.
There is an outer and an inner world,
A world of shadow and of substance both,
And strangely men confuse them in the dim
Uncertain light of sensibility.
The world which seems alone to be, scarce is !
Seeming so real—it crumbleth at a touch !
A perishing, a fading world it is !
While that which seems to men doubtful as dreams
Abideth ever. Say, can men destroy
Beauty or truth ? Can any love undo ?
Faith standeth while the mountains pass away.
The absolute intrinsic worth of things
Is their true life : despite all obstacles,
By reason of an immortality
Within, these do persist and shape the world.
No virtue and no excellence can die ;
They are the children of the most high God
And in the House Eternal ever dwell.

Baron. My lady, what a privilege it is
For one who daily hears the world's poor talk
To list this heavenly philosophy.

Your ardour lifts me—ah, if kings were not
And in their place philosophers sat crowned,
How were this bad world other than it is !
I marvel that the great and wise and good
Have in their day so little power given,
While even one so destitute as I
Can in a winking, and with no word asked,
Within a dungeon deep immure my foe,
Pursue o'er sea and land the man I hate,
And like the gods regard not consequence.

Lady. My lord, your irony does miss the truth :
We are careless oft of death—but soon the grave
Stirs from its low and silent menacing
And like a couchant beast glareth to spring.
The things we are indifferent to, still are !
And such is the deep justice of the world,
In every wrong or crime, or soon or late,
The doer is the chiefest sufferer.

Baron. Ah, what a comforting philosophy—
The world *ideal*, spite of all we see !—
Just at the bottom, spite of many rogues !—
Whose tragedy turns mocking comedy
In the next scene, and comedy—ah, no,
We'll not reverse it—so, to change the theme !
How like you this light banquet ? Far and wide
To ensure a delicacy in your meat
My wealth hath flown : and this small central dish,
Shaped like a heart—no common morsel is.

Lady. I love all rare and delicate delights ;
Sunrise and sunset and the starry sky
Intoxicate me more than choicest wine :
And since we cannot wholly spirit be,
Must even the diviner part to feed
Care for the body, stoop to meat and drink,
Aught that can save from grossness in the feast,
Fastidiousness or daintiness, is well :
For lightness is the true charm of repast.

Baron. Most true, but still your praise is general ;
Have you no words for this particular feast ?
Hath it no rare and no peculiar taste ?
Why, even, I, poor bungler, fitting speech
Could almost find for such a dish as this,—
It hath a sweetness as of love divine,
The bitterness as of a mortal heart.

Lady. My lord, why this unnatural look and voice ?
Speaking of things divine and sorrowful
Your eyes are flooded with an evil joy !

Baron. Ah, surely joy is not unnatural
To one whose dearest wish is gratified ;
My ancestors, returning from the wars,
Did ever smile,—

Ah ! curious woman heart,
Divining ever the impossible,
Instinctive of all visionary things,

Incapable of just the simple fact !
Have you no words, know you not what you have
eaten ?
Think of all sweetest things and things most rich !
This dish with mine own hand I have prepared.

(a pause.)

What is there sweeter than a lover's heart ?
What is more rich than blood ?—
Ah, still no words,
Only a horror questioning in the eyes—
When did the credulous ever yet believe ?

(he calls.)

Ho there ! Bring in the minstrel's head.

*(Enter retainer, with the bleeding head of the
minstrel.)*

Lady,
This is the minstrel's head, *that* is his heart.
Is not the dish that I have given you good ?
Have you no word of common thanks ?

Lady. My lord,
The food that you have given is so good
My lips shall taste no other till I die.

(She hastily quits the room.)

Baron. Most haughty lady, such an abstinence
Is my desire. A fluttering away—
A lingering anguish—is't not what I planned?

(Enter retainer hastily.)

Ret. My lord!—Ah me!—Pardon my lord—One
Hath fallen from the eastern battlement.

Baron. Well, throw his body on the dunghill, fool!
Is this a matter for my privacy?

Ret. My lord! it is a woman that hath fallen.

Baron. A woman?

Ret. My lord! it is the baroness.

(a pause.)

Baron (aside). Ah—and to be so thwarted at the
last!
If all the wickedness we can devise,
And all the crimes so cunningly conceived,
Because of something overlooked at last,
Should be in vain—

A HYMN OF HUMILITY.

What can I give to Thee,
 Master divine ?
 Hast Thou Thyself not given me
 Whate'er is mine ?
 Thy favours hem me in on every side,
 There is no place at all for mortal pride.

Am I made rich in prayer ?
 Thee must I bless :
 'Tis Thou Thyself in me dost stir
 Divine distress :
 The very trust that guides me to Thy feet
 Is Thine own hand outstretched my hand to meet.

Whate'er in me can bless
 Is but a wave
 Of that vast sea of tenderness
 That Thee outdrove
 From Thy far home a child on earth to be,
 Dear elder brother of humanity.

Thou hast all gifts, I none :
Naked I stand
A very beggar at Thy throne,
And from Thy hand
Daily accept what Thou dost daily give—
The spirit's food, the breath whereby I live.

One thing remains for me—
To own that Thou
Art all, I nothing save in Thee,
Then low to bow
And offer back with clear humility
The very gifts Thyself hast given me.

FIGHT THE GOOD FIGHT.

Against the foe without,
 Against the foe within,
Against despair and doubt,
 Against each subtle sin,
With ardour that grows never cold
Fight the good fight like them of old.

The citadel of God
 Still beckons us afar,
But sternly mounts the road,
 And many foes there are
To daunt our courage and our faith
And hurl us downward unto death.

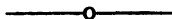
New dangers menace round,
 New weapons must be ours,
The stubborn alien ground
 Shall tax our utmost powers :
Chill are the blasts that sweep yon skies
And bleak the heights of sacrifice.

EARLIER WORKS BY WILL FOSTER.



THE FALLEN CITY AND OTHER POEMS.

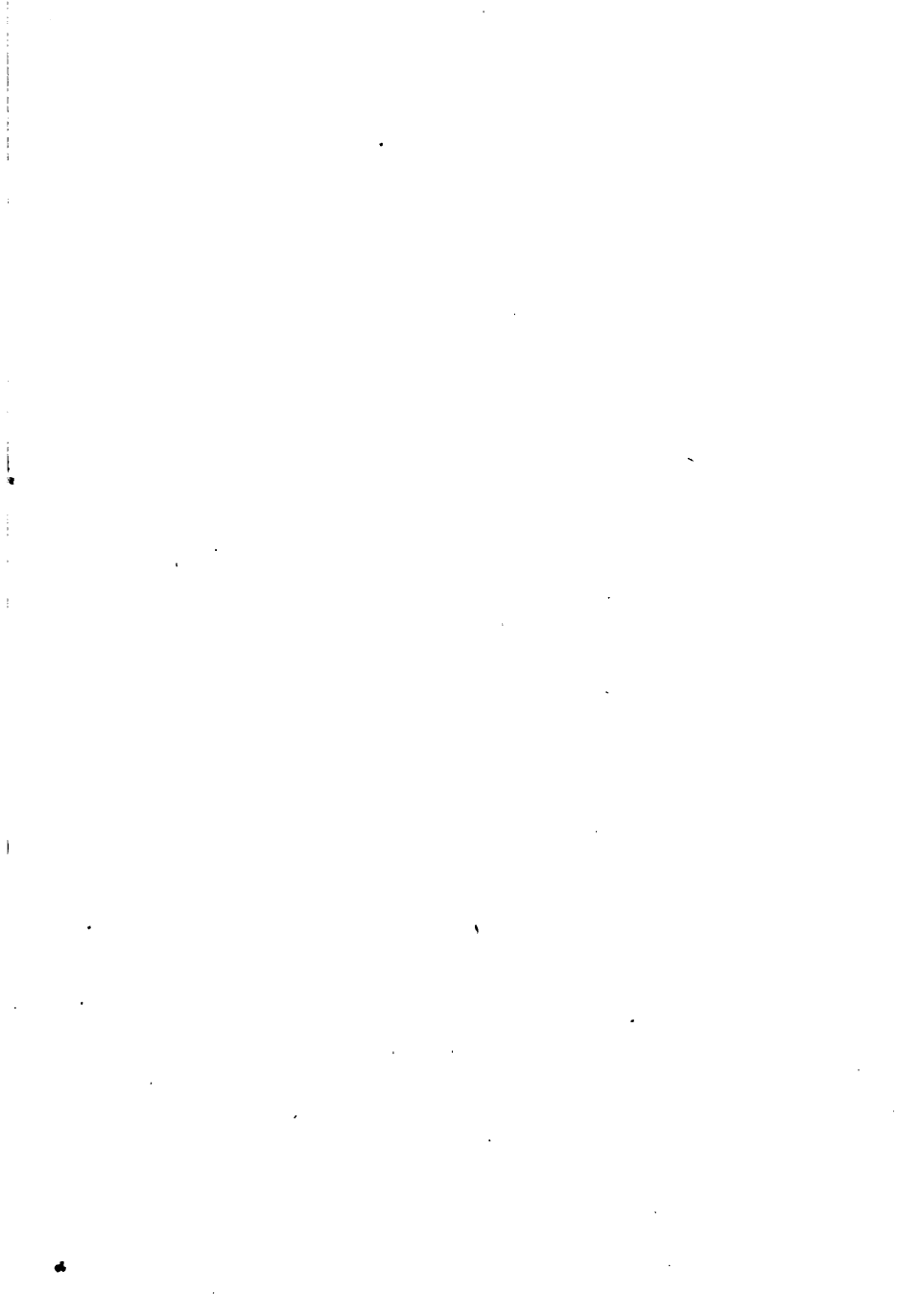
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